

NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

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GRADE LEVEL: Elementary

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NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS - Main Concepts:

Religion was something that surrounded man at all times. Their lives were immersed in religious experience. There was hardly anything that was not religious.

Native American religious beliefs were inextricably entwined with the three elements of Time, Place, and Relationship.

Religion embodied the reciprocal relationship between people and the sacred processes (life) in the world. The Circular Pattern - a manifestation of man in tune with nature and God (the essence of reciprocation) - was their religion.

"At the center of the earth
I stand.
Behold me
At the center of the wind
I stand.
Behold me,
A root of herb,
Therefore I stand,
At the wind center
I stand."

Song of the Sacred Pole
Teton Sioux Sundance

Health was not a medical issue, but rather a religious one. If one was sick, it was an indication that one was out of tune with the rhythms of nature(God) - not centered, not in reciprocation.

Five Schemes of Native American Religious Beliefs:

1. The High God as Creator or Spirit
2. Intermediary Divinities & Demigods
3. Creation
4. Eschatology or Last Things - death is the end of the road of life
5. An elaborate Cosmology affecting the whole range of religious activities (cosmology meaning a coherent explanation of their world).

Specific examples of the above five schemes:

The Trickster - an example of an intermediary divinity, along with other particular animals

Creation Myths - "Coyote, the Trickster" from Gods & Men

The Medicine Man and Medicine Bundles

The Sacred Pipe - reserved for special public and private events

Dreams - The Vision Quest

The Kachina Doll

(2)

A means of enabling your students to relate to in a meaningful way and thereby increase understanding of Native American religious beliefs is to compare or contrast it with Christianity.

Comparison Points:

<u>Christianity Concepts</u>	<u>Native American Concepts</u>
Creation by High God	Creation by High God
Ministers, Bishops, Pope	Medicine Man
Saints, Disciples	Divine Intermediaries: Trickster, Animals, & Elements
Guardian Angel	Guardian Spirit
TAKing Holy Communion	Smoking the Sacred Pipe
Holy water, Relics, Icons	Medicine Bundle
Robes, Headresses	Costumes, masks, & Headresses
Special music for ceremonies	Special music for ceremonies
Prayers	Chants
Giving Thanks	Giving Thanks
Asking for blessings	ASking for blessings
Observing special feastdays	Observing special feastdays
The Golden Rule	Karma

Points for Contrasting:

<u>Christianity Concepts</u>	<u>Native American Concepts</u>
Man born with original sin (intrinsically evil)	Nature is good, therefore, man, being part of nature is good
God has human form (Father, Son)	Chief god is the Sun
Human intermediary divinities	Animal and elements of nature as intermediary divinities
Bible	Myths passed by word of mouth
Life after death in heaven or hell	Reincarnation

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RESOURCE BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books:

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topic of interest: Coyote, The Trickster

Bleeker, Sonia, The Chippewa Indians. New York: William Morrow & Company, 1955.

topic of interest: The Medicine Man

Bleeker, Sonia, The Delaware Indians. New York: William Morrow & Company, 1953.

topic of interest: The Doll Ceremony

Hofsinde, Robert (Grey-Wolf), The Indians' Secret World. New York: William Morrow & Company, 1955.

topic of interest: Kachinas and The Medicine Pipe

Nolan, Ann Clark, In My Mother's House. New York: Viking Press, 1963.

topic of interest: Man's relationship with nature

Showers, Paul, Indian Festivals. Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, LTD, 1969.

topic of interest: Medicine Bundles and The Green Corn Celebration

Tunis, Edwin, Indians. Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1959.

topic of interest: Religion and Superstition

The Eiteljorg Museum of American Indian and Western Art
500 West Washington Street
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204
317-636-9378

Boy Scouts of America Crossroads of American Council
1900 North Meridian Street
Indianapolis, Indiana 46202
317-925-1900

three objects
wrapped in leather

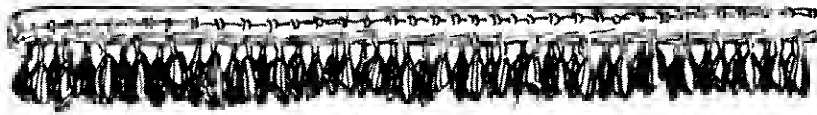


black
"charm stone"



miniature bowl

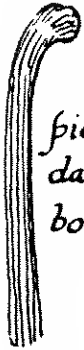
leather-covered stick
with deer-hoof rattles



small
r. spoon



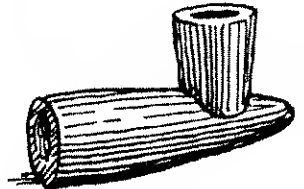
piece of
darkened
bone



Bone
whistle



small stone pipe



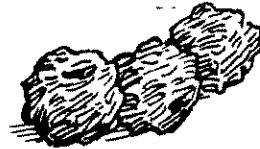
piece of dried root



small wooden bowl



three dried fruits



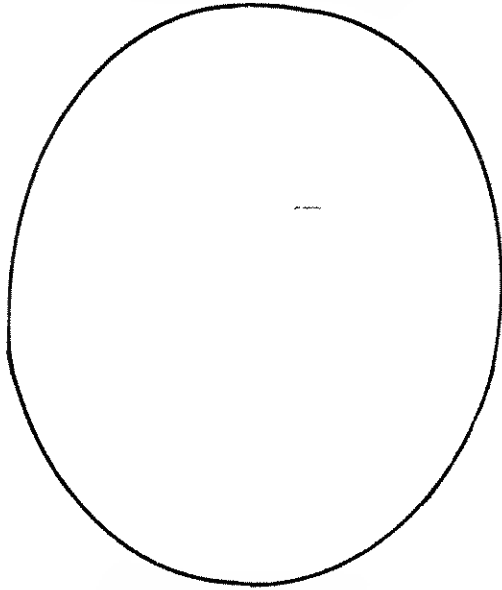
Sacre
and i

thong with one bear claw

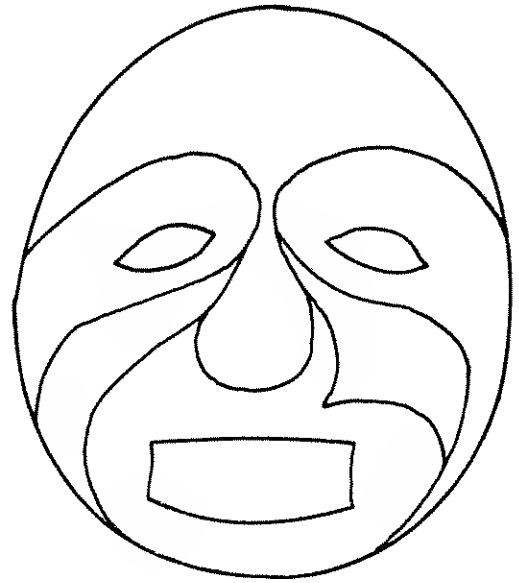


MASKS

Masks were often used in religious ceremonies or in dancing—just for fun! The mask below is a “wildman” mask. It tells the story of a man who loses his wits when he’s bitten by an animal.



1. Start with an oval shape.



2. Add the eyes, nose, and mouth. Additional lines, as shown, give expression to the face.

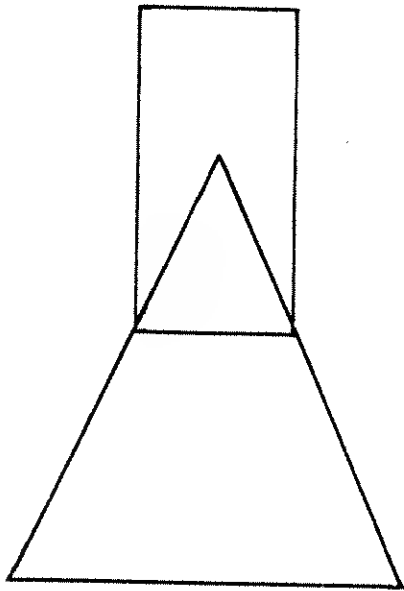


3. Add details to the eyes, nose, and mouth. Use the lines from the previous step as guidelines for creating the eyebrows as well as details around the chin and the cheeks. Add lines for hair at the top of the mask—stop here if it’s getting too scary!

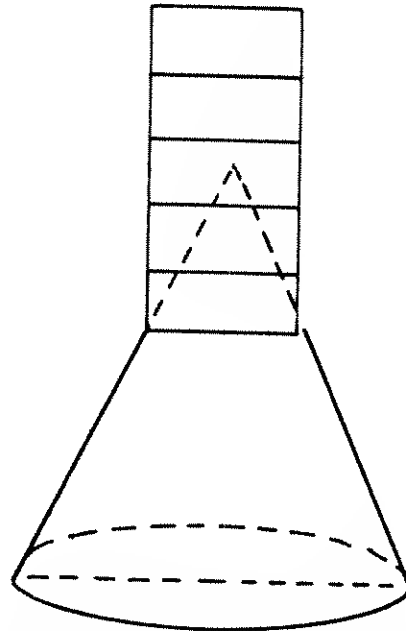


4. For an even more gruesome wildman mask, add the details shown above.

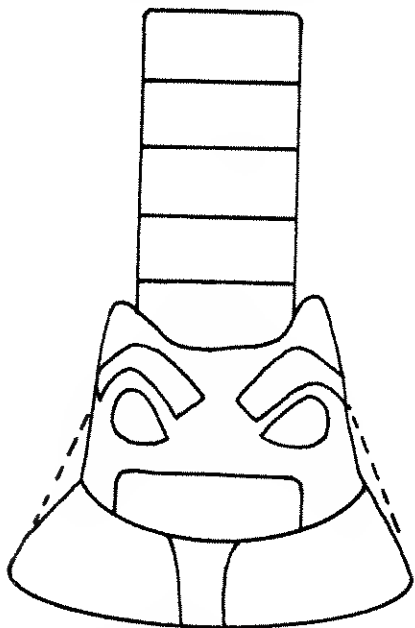
The mask on this page was worn on ceremonial occasions by the Indian chief. The sections rising from the top of the hat show the chief's rank within the tribe, just as a sergeant's stripes indicate his position in the armed forces.



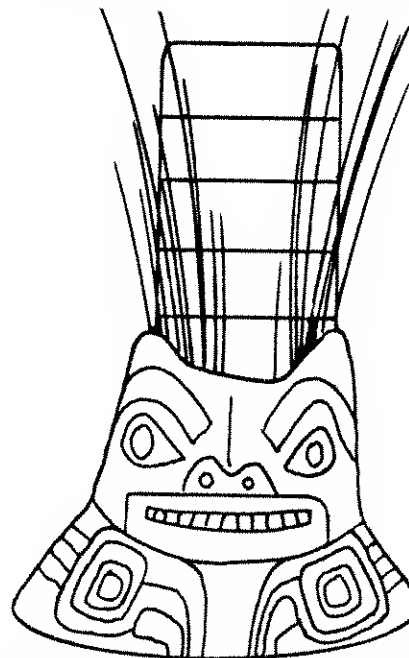
1. Start with a triangular shape interlocking with a simple rectangle.



2. Subdivide the rectangle, as shown. Shape the bottom of the triangle into a cone.



3. Soften the contours of the "cone" along the top and bottom. Add details to the mask face.

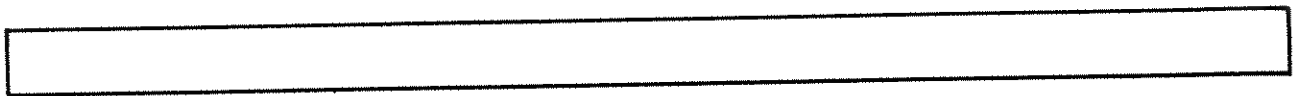


4. Decorate your mask, as shown above, or anyway you like. The hair extending from the top of the mask was probably made of grass or reeds.

THE PEACE PIPE

The **peace pipe** was a sacred instrument used in religious, social, and political ceremonies. Decorations on the pipe and even the way it was held and passed on had significance. Smoking the peace pipe was a signal that the smoker gave a pledge of honor.

1. Start with a long rectangular shape for the stem of the pipe.



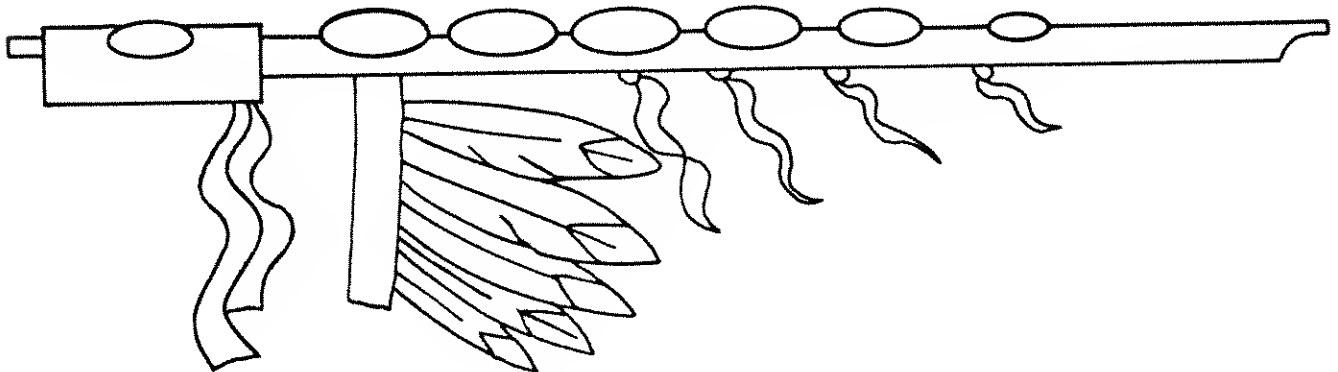
2. Add a small rectangle for the bowl of the pipe in which the tobacco was placed. Shape the opposite end of the pipe—that's the mouthpiece.



3. Add one small oval at the top of the bowl and several along the stem. These indentations in the stem of the pipe were helpful for gripping the object.



4. Add feathers and horsehair decoration. Now you're ready to "smoke" the peace pipe.

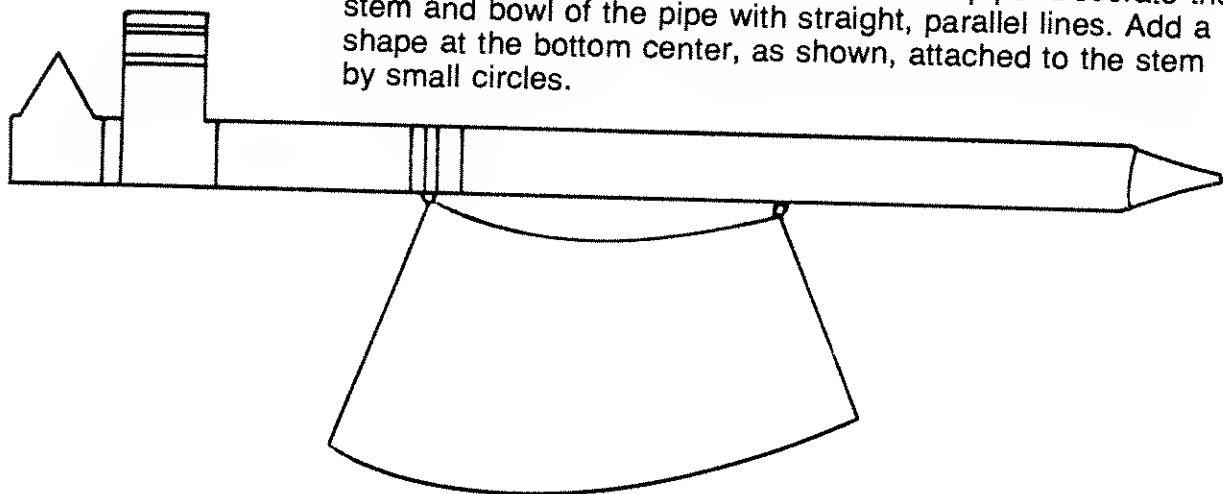


Most pipes were made of wood, clay, or stone with designs cut into them. Pipe stems were often decorated with feathers, horsehair, or colored cloth.

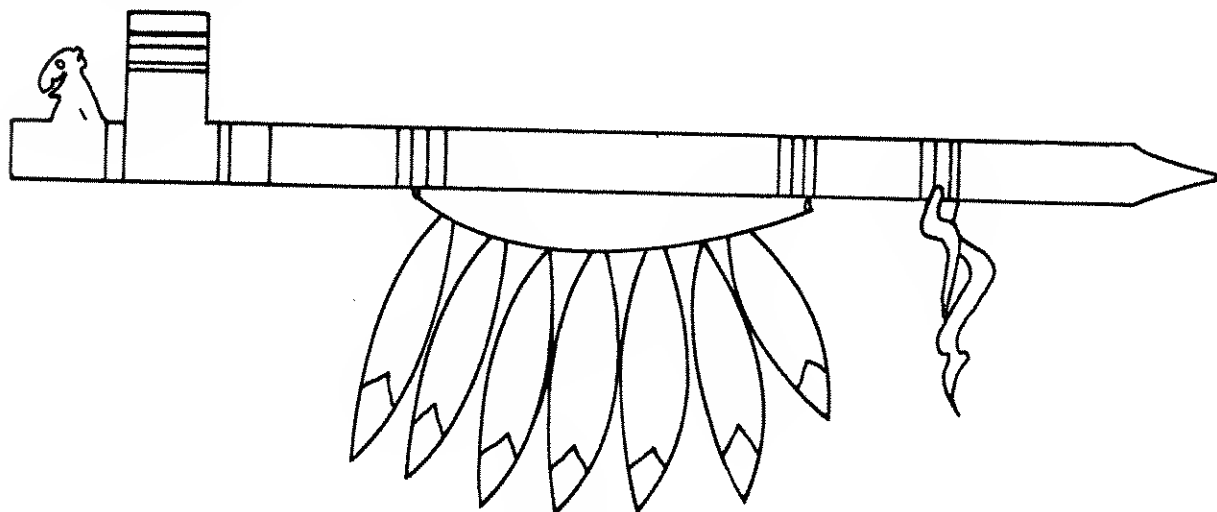
1. Start with a long, narrow rectangle.



2. Add the pipe's bowl and shape the mouthpiece, as shown. Add a triangular figure at the far left of the pipe. Decorate the stem and bowl of the pipe with straight, parallel lines. Add a shape at the bottom center, as shown, attached to the stem by small circles.

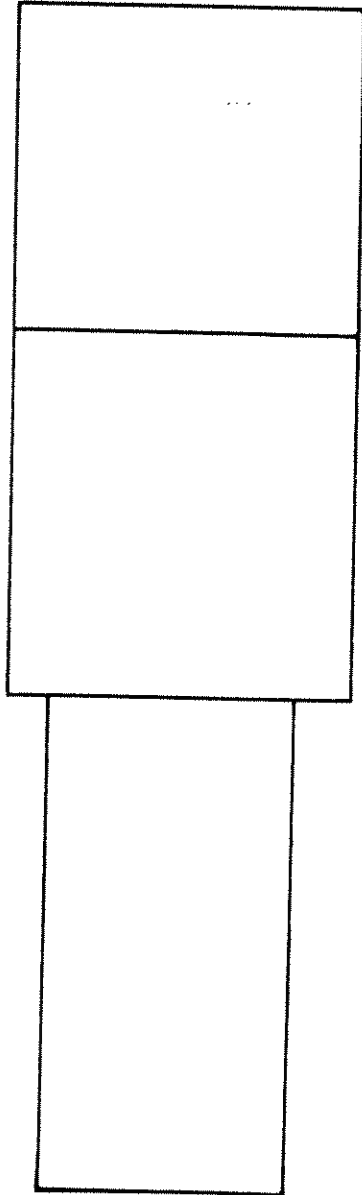


3. Complete the pipe by adding decorative items, such as those shown above: feathers, fringes, linear carvings along the stem and bowl. Finally, shape the triangular figure from the previous step into the head of an animal, such as the one shown above.

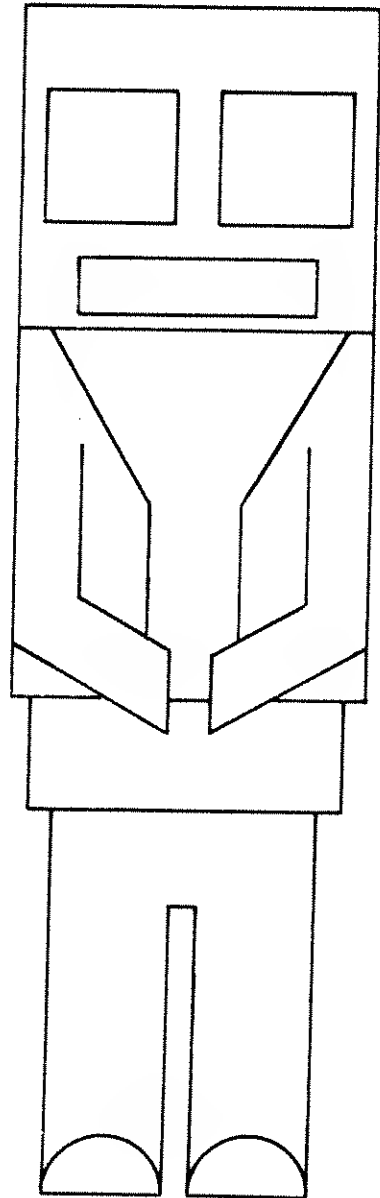


KACHINA DOLL

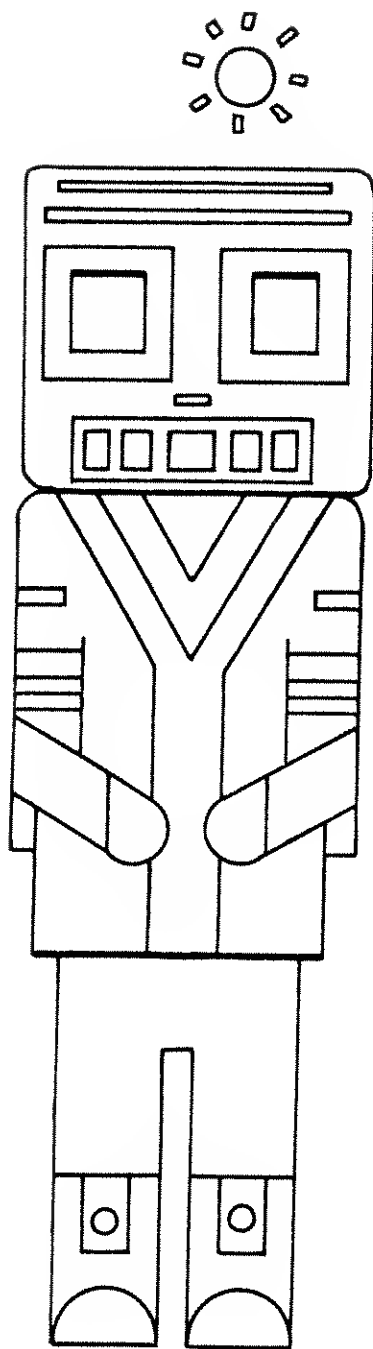
The Pueblo people believed that **kachinas** were intermediaries between man and god. They were thought to bring good things such as rain, crops, sunlight, and long life. Kachina dolls represented these supernatural beings.



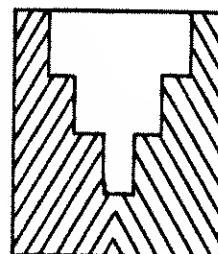
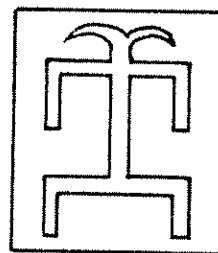
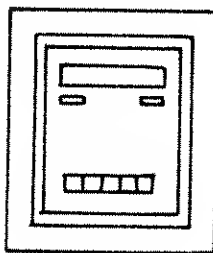
1. Start your kachina doll with two squares and a long rectangle below them. The squares will be the head and the body; the rectangle will be the legs.



2. Fill in the eyes and the mouth; the arms and the jacket; the legs and the feet.



3. Then, decorate your kachina doll anyway you like, or follow the suggested kachina doll pattern to the left. Perhaps, this kachina brings sunlight—note the sun above its head.



Here are some designs you can use to decorate your kachina doll.